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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006621

SIPDIS

PLEASE PASS TO DHS AND FEMA
DEPARTMENT FOR USAID ADMINISTRATOR AND OFDA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/28/2014

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER: U.S. VISIT OF TURKISH DEPUTY PRIME
MINISTER MEHMET ALI SAHIN, DECEMBER 1 - 3

Classified By: DCM Robert Deutsch for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin is leading a six-person Turkish delegation to visit the U.S. December 1-3 at the invitation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). We understand he will also meet U/S Grossman at State and USAID Administrator Natsios. (Delegation list in para 6.) Sahin has been tasked by Prime Minister Erdogan to restructure Turkey's capability to respond and manage disasters and emergencies like the 1999 earthquakes. Sahin, who is considered politically and personally close to Erdogan, is also responsible for Turkey's policy on charitable, civic, educational and other foundations, including those established for non-Moslem religious groups designated by the Lausanne Treaty. We should use the opportunity of his visit to press him on the problems of Greek Orthodox properties and to discuss the government's views on U.S.-Turkey relations and the upcoming EU decision on Turkey's accession. Following Erdogan's lead, Sahin has also been one of the Turkish officials who have jumped on the anti-U.S. media bandwagon on Fallujah operations in Iraq. We need to tell him that such statements reverberate negatively in the U.S. and could damage the relationship.

2. (SBU) Sahin began his political career in the Islamist Milli Gorus (National View) movement. He was twice elected to Parliament in 1995 and 1999 from Islamist parties, and was a founding member of the AK Party. In 2002, he was elected again to Parliament on the AKP ticket. His background indicates that early in his career he shared strong Islamist views. However, his attitudes appear to have moderated considerably in recent years. For example, he has been one of the more helpful and understanding Turkish politicians regarding U.S. goals in Iraq.

3. (U) As Deputy Prime Minister in the AK Party government, Sahin handles a diverse portfolio of issues, including: relations with parliament; the state personnel office, including oversight of collective bargaining with public sector employees; the Youth and Sports Directorate General; the Football Federation; and foundations. Prime Minister Erdogan recently tasked him with restructuring Turkey's emergency capabilities.

4. (U) The Director General of Turkey's Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) Hassan Ipek will accompany Sahin and has worked closely with FEMA to organize the visit. Ipek hopes that Sahin's visit will convince him to recommend that Turkey restructure its system on the U.S. FEMA model. TEMA is a General Directorate in the Prime Ministry and was founded in 1999, immediately after the 1999 earthquakes near Istanbul that left 18,000 dead and nearly 400,000 buildings damaged revealed the serious shortcomings in Turkey's disaster management capabilities. TEMA maintains the country's 24-hour crisis management center and coordinates all foreign disaster assistance. Through the Prime Minister, TEMA coordinates disaster response through regional crisis management centers and other Turkish ministries. However, Ipek has identified several weaknesses that he hopes to correct: TEMA has no separate budget and no direct control over the disaster response capabilities of other government agencies. And relations between TEMA and the military's role in disasters is not clearly defined.

5. (C) Although Sahin's visit is focused on meetings with DHS and FEMA officials and visits to FEMA facilities, he is close to Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan. This is an opportunity, particularly at State, to raise other important issues with him.

-- Anti-U.S. statements regarding Fallujah: In a November 25 statement before Parliament Sahin said that Fallujah operations "give the impression of a massacre." This followed similar statements by Prime Minister Erdogan and other senior officials and a bout of anti-U.S. hysteria in the press. We should tell Sahin flat-out these are outrageous distortions and that such incorrect and misleading statements risk eroding support for Turkey in the U.S. and

significantly injure bilateral relations. We should urge Sahin to publicly correct his statement.

-- Religious properties: The issue of non-Muslim religious properties falls directly under his Foundations portfolio. We should emphasize the importance of reaching a solution to allow the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and other non-Muslim groups to regain properties expropriated by the State over the years. A Turkish court recently reached a decision effectively expropriating an historic Greek Orthodox orphanage; tax authorities recently notified a Greek Orthodox hospital in Istanbul that it owes back taxes despite being a non-profit institution. The longstanding closure of the Greek Orthodox Halki seminary remains unresolved. The Greek Orthodox community has dwindled to fewer than 3,000 people, and the future of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, which has been in Istanbul since Byzantine times, is in jeopardy. We should let Sahin know that these issues get noticed in the U.S. and Europe, and resolving them would ease doubts about Turkey's commitment to religious freedom and positively impact Turkey's image for religious tolerance, improve relations with the U.S. and bolster Turkey's EU bid.

-- EU Integration: In the run up to December 17, we should also urge Sahin to make sure the GOT is careful with its rhetoric and does not paint itself into a corner. Turkey should keep focused on the strategic objective. As long as it gets a clear date to begin negotiations for a successful objective of full membership without singularization of Turkey, it should view the result positively. However, Sahin should be encouraged to take steps now to continue demonstrating Turkey's political will to implement EU values and standards.

16. (U) Turkish Delegation:

Mehmet Ali Sahin, Deputy Prime Minister
Hassan Ipek, Director General, TEMA
Murat Kul, Aide to Sahin
Aydin Demir, Aide to Sahin
Dr. Derin Ural, Director Center of Excellence for Disaster Management
Dr. Faruk Karadogan, President, Istanbul Technical University
EDELMAN